

Won't You Carry Me (Out of the Darkness) by urdearestmom

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Summary: It had been an ordinary day. He'd gotten up early, gone to work, worked, and was now on his way home. But then- Michael Wheeler was only minding his own business picking up his prescription at the CVS down the street from work when those two women showed up. The purple-haired one, a little shorter than the blue-haired one, told the cashier there was a leak in the washroom.

1. Chapter 1

this is a fic that takes place in the 90s, but it follows the canon of the show. so, everything that happened in seasons 1 and 2 also happened in this fic. it is somewhat inspired by Full Circle by LBorealis (phenomenal fic on AO3!) but of course with my own twists :)

Wednesday, January 10, 1996

It had been an ordinary day. He'd gotten up early, gone to work, worked, and was now on his way home. But then-

Michael Wheeler was only minding his own business picking up his prescription at the CVS down the street from work when those two women showed up. The purple-haired one, a little shorter than the blue-haired one, told the cashier there was a leak in the washroom.

Mike looked in that direction himself and didn't see anything, but the cashier ran off in a panic to check it out. By this point in his life, Mike had learned to trust what he saw. Something fishy was going on.

The purple-haired one started grabbing toiletries off the shelves as the blue-haired one went to the lone dry foods aisle with a swish of her bob. The two women hadn't seen him standing at the pharmacy counter in the back, and since the pharmacist seemed to be taking eons to find the exact same prescription Prozac that Mike picked up on the same day every month, he was the only one in the open store with them. But he was tired. He'd worked from nine in the morning to eleven at night and forgotten to take his last dose at lunch, and it was weighing on him. Plus, the women looked like the type of people who were probably armed. He wasn't going to stop them.

But he would investigate.

The pharmacist returned just as the door shut with a gust of cold air behind the women. "Here you are, Mr. Wheeler," he said, handing over the white paper bag that shook with the sound of pills.

"Thanks," he responded distractedly, handing over his payment before shoving the meds into his coat pocket and pulling his scarf up his face.

Outside, he didn't see anyone suspicious. The night was oddly calm for January in Boston, no snow falling in his eyes. The sky was inky black with a few stars in it. His boots crunched over ice as he walked to the nearest stop to catch a bus home.

"Weird," Mike said out loud, his breath puffing out in a white cloud.

Thursday, January 11, 1996

Mike woke up the next morning with his heart racing from the dream he'd had. He could only recall a vague idea of it, but he knew it was the same type of recurring dream he'd been having for the last seven years.

And he knew it was probably never going to happen. If she'd wanted to find him she could've by now. She was either dead or just didn't want to see him ever again.

He stretched on the futon and turned over to grab the TV remote from the floor. A small, used, TV sat on the ground across from him and he flicked it on to Channel 7, the glow from the screen bathing the water-stained and cracked walls of the shitty apartment he lived in blue.

There was a news report about some man in Florida who'd attempted to wrestle an alligator and ended up in hospital, but Mike wasn't interested in that. He wanted to see if there were any reports about the two women he'd seen the day before. Surely the CVS employees would've noticed that some things were gone, or that there was never a leak. The store cameras probably picked up on stuff. He was just waiting.

Mike spent the entire morning on the futon, obsessively watching the news for anything that might be suspicious. He ate a bowl of dry cereal he'd left out the day before, now stale, and an apple that was halfway to rotten. He didn't have much money left after paying rent

and bills for the shittiest apartment in the world, so he had to stretch what was left in his kitchen before going grocery shopping. He left for work frustrated that he hadn't seen anything at all.

Macy's was a depressing place to work at, but Mike was kind of numb to things anyway. His meds helped, of course, otherwise he wouldn't be taking them, but they were never going to be able to cure him. He'd probably be better if he actually hung out with people, but his formerly-close friends were scattered across the country after college and the friends he'd made during weren't really close to him in the first place. He hadn't let them be. The only people Mike saw regularly were his coworkers.

His family was also estranged. He thought about them from time to time, wondering what they were doing. Nancy was the only one he still talked to. He'd seen her at Christmas when she came up to Boston to spend it with him in his tiny box of an apartment, but he hadn't spoken to his parents since the argument he'd had with them after graduation about staying in Boston indefinitely. Of course, that meant he hadn't seen Holly in about two and a half years either.

Since Nancy had left, his parents had wanted Mike to return to Hawkins and get a job so he could eventually settle down, but he couldn't bring himself to do it. He'd spent the second half of senior year of high school itching to leave, to search the world for her, and by going to college he could do something with himself that might be able to help him find her. Boston was close to MIT, and for some reason, he had a good feeling about the city. It was something he knew he needed to follow because he usually had good instincts, but his parents didn't see it that way. They threatened to cut him off if he didn't come back, and when he didn't they did exactly as they said. He was living off of what he made at Macy's, a little more than minimum wage.

Mike had gotten his degree in computer science and he knew he could probably get a better job than what he had, but if he did then he wouldn't have time to do what he really wanted. He'd learned to hack in college, so after he'd saved enough and bought his computer he would routinely hack into government servers searching for information. The Boston police never had anything of appeal, but the Department of Energy, his main interest, sometimes did. It was hard

to crack into, though, so he wasn't able to do it often. He'd never been able to hack onto the FBI, though he was certain that if he ever did, he'd find a treasure trove of questionable things.

The afternoon and evening passed the same way they usually did: quietly. There was exactly one cranky customer, but Mike wasn't even at the register when that happened so it wasn't his concern. It was close to closing when something caught his attention: a bluster of cold air entered the store behind two women dressed all in black. He couldn't see their faces, just as he hadn't seen the blue-haired one's the day before, but he could see that one of them was the same purple-haired woman from the CVS. The other one could've been the same person except that she had long red hair reminiscent of Mike's old friend Max.

"Could be a wig," he muttered to himself, hiding behind a shelf. The two walked forward and the cashier didn't react. None of the employees in the front of the store did, either, which Mike thought suspicious until he realized they were all within the purple-haired woman's line of vision.

He wasn't.

She's doing something.

Mike watched as the redhead went to the other side of the store, her purple-haired companion following with her arms held up close to her body in what seemed to be a protective stance. To his luck, they hadn't spotted him, and he had a feeling that even if they did they wouldn't make a fuss about it. He decided he'd make use of their obliviousness to his presence and shuffled into the back as quickly as he could.

He got dressed and grabbed his bag, clocking out and running back into the store and then out the door with a yelled, "I gotta go!" To his confused coworkers.

The two women were still inside, so Mike hid around the corner of the building and waited for them to come out. They did before long, and he watched them walk away for a little, far enough that he could follow without them noticing. He suddenly had a burning desire to

know who they were, why they were stealing from stores, and how they did it without anyone noticing. It was more intense than anything he'd felt in months, far surpassing the short thrill he got every time he hacked into private servers. The whole situation reeked strongly of X-Men type shit, things he'd dealt with at one point in his life and had thought were over when she left.

Once they were at a good distance, Mike started walking after them so as not to lose them. He trailed after them for a time, carefully noting his surroundings so he could remember how to get back there if necessary. The three of them ended up in a seedy looking neighbourhood full of shady houses and a big warehouse at the end of the block. Mike figured the women might be going in there, so he let them get further ahead as he watched.

He was right. As soon as they went inside, he ran after them, stopping upon reaching the door and trying to puzzle out how to get in without them noticing. He looked around and spotted a ladder bolted to the side of the warehouse, leading up to a balcony of sorts and a large window that was slightly opened. Mike climbed up and lifted the window the rest of the way, peeking inside before sticking one of his legs through. He'd been lucky the window was open and also that he hadn't fallen off the icy ladder.

His heart was pounding against his ribs as he prowled through the room, finding nothing and proceeding to make his way out onto another balcony. This one was shrouded in shadow, overlooking a large room downstairs that was lit up by floodlights pinned to the bottom of the platform Mike was on. If he stood directly over one he would be practically invisible in his black coat.

The women he'd tailed there were in the middle of the room. There were two ratty old mattresses on the floor and the redhead was laying on her side on one of them. Mike still couldn't see her face, which would make it a little hard to identify her if circumstance called for it, but he could see the purple-haired woman clearly now. Her features were twisted in anger.

"What do you mean, you don't want to come?" She snarled.

The redhead murmured something.

"We're sisters! We are a team! You cannot just leave everything to me." The purple-haired woman had some kind of accent that Mike couldn't place, and he wished he could hear the redhead speak to see if she was the same.

Suddenly, she sat up violently, her hair whipping around her shoulders. "I told you I'm tired! You can do it yourself, you were doing it for years before I found you! Leave me alone for tonight."

Mike felt like someone had cracked an egg over his head, a coolness flowing down and settling on his shoulders, making the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. The redhead's voice was shockingly familiar and had a decidedly Midwestern lilt to it, but he couldn't place her either. He watched as she lay back down and wrapped herself up in the raggedy blanket that was on top of her.

The purple-haired woman sighed and crossed her arms. "Is this about the boy again? It's been several years."

Her sister muttered something in response from beneath the blanket.

"I know you do, but hurting yourself like this isn't helping anyone." The purple-haired woman stood there for a second more before sighing. "I have to go. We *will* talk about this later. And we *will* get her back."

She walked through a doorway that Mike couldn't see from his position, and a few moments of breathless silence later he heard the outside doors open and close again. Something about these two women was pulling him in; he needed to know who they were. The redhead's voice seemed to reach out to him like a siren's call, beckoning him to her side. Maybe if he saw her face he'd know where he recognized her voice from.

But he couldn't expose himself just yet.

So he waited some more. Mike sat on the platform staring at this person he felt an almost magnetic pull to, seeing if she would fall asleep. After about a quarter of an hour of watching her, she stopped wriggling on the mattress and stayed on her side, facing away from him. Even better, because then if she wasn't actually asleep, she

wouldn't see him.

Mike got up as quietly as he could and made his way to the iron stairs leading to the main floor, going down one step at a time as lightly as possible. He managed to get all the way down, glancing at the woman for any signs of consciousness every few seconds, and then absconded to another room through an open doorway he saw.

In there, he pulled the cord to turn on a weak lightbulb and looked around to see a box on a table. It was open and he peeked inside to see all kinds of IDs piled on top of some folders at the bottom. The folders caught his attention, so he dug through the plastic keycards and such to get them out.

The first one had newspaper clippings in it, with recent ones on top and old ones going back to the late sixties and early seventies, all about missing kids. Mike saw a few about a woman named Terry Ives, a woman he'd met before. *She* had introduced them. That was when he knew for sure that those two women, the one gone and the one sleeping in the other room, were connected to the lab in Hawkins. At least one of them, the purple-haired one, had abilities of some kind; that much was suddenly clear. Maybe they could tell Mike what had happened to their sister.

The second folder was just as interesting, if not more; it contained files on those missing kids. Files that looked like they had been kept by the lab, if the Hawkins National Laboratory logo stamped on the bottom of every page was anything to go by. Listed were names and dates of birth, blood types, the ability that each child seemed to possess, and results of innumerable trial experiments along with a picture clipped to the top of the first page. Mike sifted through the pile looking for one in particular, and when he came across number eleven he stopped short.

The picture had probably been taken shortly before she escaped because she looked about the same as she had when he'd first met her. Eleven's terrified twelve-year-old face stared back up at him and Mike almost felt like throwing up. He'd known about her past, of course, after she'd decided to tell him about it, but hearing it from her mouth and seeing tangible proof of it were two different things. He'd been in the lab as well, but by the time he'd first gone in there,

all that type of equipment had been removed. Looking in the folder was horrifying knowing what had really been done to those kids.

Suddenly, Mike heard rustling and a quiet voice.

"Kali?"

It was the redhead. Mike's eyes shot to the doorway to see her starting to sit up. He shouldn't have stayed. He looked around quickly, heart in his throat, before spotting a window on the other side of the room that looked like it would be big enough for him to escape through. He plucked at the light cord, turning the lightbulb off and receiving an angry yelp from the other room. Darting in the direction of the window, Mike yanked it open and vaulted himself through it, landing in the snow outside in a heap of limbs.

He scrambled up and ran opposite the way he'd come as fast he could, stopping after a minute to catch his breath in a copse of trees. The freezing air burned his lungs and he bent over, wheezing. He stood there for a few minutes to let his heart rate go back to normal before standing back up and blinking furiously at the slew of feelings that had blurred together inside of him tonight.

Mike started to laugh; a deep rumbling laugh punctuated with wheezes as the cold air burned him some more. He probably sounded like a madman but he didn't care, there was no one around to hear! He felt delirious, like he was high on actually feeling something positive for once.

Only as he started to make his way home did it register in his mind that the name the redhead had called out had been Kali. That was a name Mike recognized. It was the name of her sister, the one she'd found when she'd run away to Chicago when she was thirteen.

He *knew* staying in Boston had been a good idea! If anyone was bound to know what had happened to her, it was Kali.

He'd be back.

2. Chapter 2

Friday, January 12, 1996

Friday morning dawned with a predicted high of only 37 degrees and a low of 19. Pretty average for winter in the north. Meant the gas bill would be higher this month. Mike lay on his futon swaddled in thin blankets, staring at a crack in the ceiling just out of his direct line of vision and listening to the weather people talk. Hopefully, it wouldn't snow today, because his winter boots were tearing and he couldn't just buy new ones. The snow already on the ground was enough. Finally tiring of the incoming cold-front discussion, Mike reached out of his blankets for the remote and changed the channel.

"-has been reported and appears to be a suicide, however, police are investigating. Neighbours have said that he seemed normal, no strange behaviour or contact in the area. Homicide seems unlikely as neighbours, family, and friends have stated that this man had no enemies..."

A death. The night Kali had gone out to do something. *Interesting.* Mike's brain whirled with possibilities, recalling that when *she* had told him about Kali, she'd been nervous to tell him exactly what it was that Kali and her gang did. But he remembered. And it was certainly suspicious that this man, apparently without enemies, was found dead the day after.

Mike went to work thinking about it, staring out the window on the bus and then at people's shoes on the train. He debated the pros and cons of going to see Kali himself because while he wanted to talk to her, he was pretty sure she was responsible for that guy's death and he didn't want to meet the same fate. In the end, though, he decided he'd visit her anyway. His need to know what happened after *she* left was greater than any fear of Kali that he might have.

Work was pretty boring until his coworker Jake cornered him during their lunch hour.

"Hey, Mike," said Jake, sitting down across from Mike in the staff room. "Are you doing okay today, buddy?"

It could be said that Jake was the closest thing Mike had to a friend in Boston. They talked sometimes and had previously hung out outside of work a few times. They got along, which was important in a workplace where cooperation was often necessary, and Jake knew Mike took antidepressants, which was pretty personal, so it was a testament to Jake's trustworthiness.

But still. Jake never asked him questions like that. Mike raised a brow and bit into his measly ham sandwich.

"As okay as usual, I guess," he answered. "Why?"

Jake's gaze meant he was concerned, Mike could tell immediately. He'd seen it a thousand times over the course of the last seven years, from varying people in varying situations but always the same *look*. Jake was never going to understand, just like no one else ever had. Except for *her*. But she wasn't around anymore.

Jake pursed his lips. "You seem distracted today, I was just wondering if something happened."

Yeah, something happened, Jake, Mike thought bitterly. *The love of my life left me without a warning seven years ago and I've been depressed since, I never see my friends, and my parents don't speak to me. I'm doing fucking great.*

Out loud, he said, "Yeah, I've got some stuff on my mind. Nothing major." It was a lie, but he'd never be willing or capable of explaining the truth to Jake.

Jake nodded like he wasn't sure whether to believe Mike, but he didn't press the issue. Instead, he made small talk about the hockey game last night. Apparently, some team or other did something unexpected and Jake wasn't sure how to feel about it, but Mike didn't care about hockey. He never had, not even before everything.

He finished his sandwich as quick as he could and almost sprinted back to the register in relief. He worked the rest of the afternoon and evening with relatively little human interaction outside of the customers he rang up, same as usual. When his shift ended, he rushed to leave before he had to speak to anyone. Talking to his other

coworkers just tired him out, so he liked to avoid it if he could.

Mike ate a banana on the way to the warehouse. That was probably going to be his dinner, he wasn't sure how long he'd be there or what he even had at home. When he got there, he paused to look at it. The warehouse looked the same as it did last night, but Mike felt his skin crawl at how close he might be to knowing what he'd been after for the better part of a decade. Kali or her sister could be inside right now and they could tell him just what he wanted to know. Maybe then he could find some peace and be able to move on with his life, something he'd tried awfully hard to do but hadn't been able to accomplish.

This time, he found that the upstairs window he entered through the night before was closed, leaving him with no option but to enter using the large front doors. He could see that something broke the chain on the padlock, and he wondered what it was because it was an oddly clean break. He did his best not to make noise, but it was kind of inevitable in a place like that; everything is metal and it's all rusty, especially the door hinges. In any case, he walked slowly and carefully, coming upon the large main room again only to find it empty. The ratty mattresses were still on the floor, but no sign of people.

Mike stuck close to the wall, shuffling sideways along it. There might not be anyone on this floor, but there could very well be someone upstairs on the platforms like the one he'd been on last night, and he wanted to keep out of sight for as long as he could. He didn't want to be attacked immediately. He managed to get into the room that held the files, figuring that since it seemed neither Kali nor her sister were there, he might as well take a look at the files again. If they *were* there, turning the light on in the room would attract them, and hopefully, they wouldn't kill him immediately.

This time, Mike went straight to the subject files, bypassing the news articles altogether. He scrabbled through the pile until he found number eleven again. It was a face he hadn't seen in seven years, and she definitely didn't look the same seven years ago as she did in the picture he was looking at right now, but at the same time, she did. The shape of her face, her eyes, the expression- all the same. She

grew, sure, but she was still the same scared girl on the inside. Years of abuse will do that to you.

He read on.

S, it listed. Telekinesis, extrasensory perception, psychometry, technopathy, biokinesis, teleportation

S, it continued. Minimal spoken language, occasional episodes of opposition/defiance, prone to nosebleeds

Huh. Mike hadn't known she could teleport. Or about the psychometry part. He wondered if maybe those were one-time things, but then he looked at her file again and the clinical coldness of it made him sick. She was a *person*. A *kid*. How could anyone stand to work somewhere that treated children like lab rats and sleep at night?

He flipped to number eight and looked at the face of a child that he recognized as the purple-haired woman he saw yesterday, or if he was correct, Kali. The file was organized exactly the same way.

: Illusion, manipulation of senses

: Rebellious behavior, multiple episodes of opposition/defiance, prone to nosebleeds

All of the files were organized the same way, Mike noticed as he went through them, even the older ones, although some of them had red stamps on the bottom reading, *TERMINATED*. His skin crawled at the thought of what that could mean.

He didn't know how long he'd been standing in that room, reading, when he heard an unexpected sound. It was a growl. He looked up and immediately panicked. There was a rabid dog standing in the corner, foaming at the mouth and looking like it was about to attack. Mike backed up into the wall before he realized that this didn't make sense. The dog wouldn't have just walked past him to the other side of the room, it would've bitten him right away.

"You're right, it isn't real," came a voice from the doorway. "Smart of you. But I am."

He whipped around and it was Kali, aiming a pistol right at his head.

"Woah!" Mike exclaimed, dropping the files and holding his hands up. He might not have been having the best time in life right now, but he didn't want to *die*, either. "Don't shoot me!"

Kali raised an eyebrow. She was small but intimidating; Mike definitely never wanted to get on her bad side.

"Why shouldn't I?" She asked. "Who are you and what do you want with us?"

She didn't know that there were young people working for Brenner now; this guy looked younger than her. She figured he must be involved with the lab somehow; he was looking through the files from there, she was fairly sure this was the same person her sister told her was in here last night, and he looked vaguely familiar. What other connection could there be?

He swallowed. "My name's Mike. Mike Wheeler. And I'm looking for Eleven."

Kali's thoughts stopped for a moment. He was looking for Jane... she wasn't at the warehouse at the moment, as she wanted to be alone for a while, but she was here last night. How this man didn't realize she was right under his nose was too much for Kali to comprehend right now.

She narrowed her eyes and walked closer, keeping her gun trained on him. *Something* was nagging at her, trying to get her to remember. Why was his face familiar?

"Why are you looking for Eleven?"

"She, um-" Mike paused and looked down, his hands fidgeting nervously. "She left home seven years ago, and I- I just want to know what happened to her. I know you're her sister, so I figured if anyone would know it might be you."

His heart was in his throat. Was Kali going to shoot him or was she going to tell him what he wanted so desperately to know? She wasn't saying anything, merely scrutinizing him from behind her pistol.

"How did you know her?"

He felt like he might start crying any minute now. He thought about that sometimes. What was he to her? That she could just leave so easily without even a proper goodbye? What did he mean to her?

"I was her boyfriend," he said, and his voice cracked. "I don't know if she ever told you about me, but we met when she first escaped. I was the one who took her in, she lived in my basement for a week."

Suddenly, Kali remembered where she recognized his face from. Her sister had a locket that she never took off, and it had a picture of this guy in it. Granted, he was probably about sixteen or seventeen in it at the maximum, but he looked pretty much the same now. Just older, more tired. Kali took pity on him and lowered her gun. He immediately relaxed.

"How did you find me?" She asked. She wasn't sure whether Jane wanted to see this man, because there were things that he didn't know. And he *couldn't* know. At least not right now.

"I was at the CVS the other night, I saw you with your sister," he answered. "And I work at Macy's, so I followed you guys here last night because I thought you were acting weird. Then I saw these files and I realized you had to be connected to the lab."

Kali almost laughed at the irony. He was looking for Jane and yet he'd seen her three times and not realized it was her. She supposed it was a trick of fate, though; Jane would be better prepared if she chose to see him rather than if she were surprised.

Mike's throat was closing up at Kali's silence, and his eyes were burning. A second later he felt the first tear fall from his eye, running hot down his cheek. This hadn't happened in a while. It only happened on the worst of his days, but now that he was so close to finding out what happened to her he almost didn't want to know. What if the answer was exactly what he most hoped he wouldn't hear?

"I just want to know what happened to her, if she's okay," he said defeatedly. "I've spent the time since I last saw her trying to find her."

Kali felt sorry for him. For both of them. She'd been a close witness to her sister's suffering since she left her family and friends behind because of that *devil* Brenner. The first year was the worst, not only because it was a fresh wound, but because at the same time Jane was dealing with something bigger than herself. Something she didn't know how she would cope with. But Kali couldn't tell this Mike about any of it. He didn't know and she was fairly sure Jane didn't want him to know.

When she looked back at him after contemplating what she could and could not say to him, he was still crying. She could tell, even though he'd turned away from her and braced himself against the table.

"I can tell you she is alive," Kali started. "And as well as can be, considering the circumstances."

His breath shuddered. "Thank you," was what he said, and his voice was raw. "Did she- ever say anything, you know, about us?"

Kali nodded sadly. "She misses all of you. But especially her policeman. And you."

He didn't respond and Kali was hoping that Jane wouldn't come back before he left. They were going to have to talk about, this, though. She thought of something.

"Where do you live?" She asked. "I'm going to be here for a bit, but in case I need to find you."

Mike left her with his address and he thought she looked like she might hug him or something, but then thought better of it. He spent the next half hour going home in a mindless haze, only able to focus on the words echoing through his brain.

She is alive. And as well as can be.

She's alive.

He didn't even make it to the futon before he collapsed against a wall, in tears again. He felt like the scab over his heart had been ripped off, the tear underneath that she'd left all those years ago newly opened. *She's alive.* He wondered what kept her from telling

any of them. Maybe she just didn't think it was important enough. Maybe she forgot they cared about her. Maybe she forgot they *loved* her.

Maybe she forgot she loved *him*.

His heart had been irreparably broken since the day she left, and he wasn't sure seeing her again would help. But he hoped Kali would visit him.

3. Chapter 3

Saturday, January 13, 1996

Not even on Saturday did Mike take the day off. He couldn't really afford to. He got off Sundays and Thursday mornings and that was it. He knew he lived a dreary existence, but with his friends out of touch and his family not in contact at all, there wasn't much to do anyway.

But now, after Kali dropped the bomb that Eleven is alive, he couldn't help but want to take the day off and go talk to Kali some more. She had spoken as though she'd been with her sister recently, as though she knew something he didn't. Maybe...

A thought occurred to Mike out of the blue and he dropped his bowl of cereal in the sink in shock. What if the other woman, the one with blue and then red hair, was *her*? He hadn't seen her face, after all, he couldn't be sure. Her voice had seemed so familiar, it would make so much sense. He felt breathless at the idea that he could've been so close to who he was searching for without even realizing it.

Macy's was predictably bleak. In the morning alone, three different customers yelled at Mike about gifts he couldn't exchange or refund for them. Two of them didn't have receipts so the most he could have done was give them store credit, but they didn't want that, no. The third was a man trying to return a watch. He had the receipt and he was adamant, but the watch wasn't in resellable condition. Its glass front was so cracked the numbers weren't visible, and two of the links were badly dented. Mike didn't want to know what the hell that watch had been through, but he really wished the man would just understand that he was being an idiot and should leave.

Mike heard the man call him an asshole as he was finally convinced to leave the store, so Mike followed and called after him. "I'm just doing my job, sir, maybe you should take better care of your watches!"

The man flipped him the bird on his way down the street and Mike glared at his back, hoping he'd trip into the snow. He didn't, but Mike could always entertain fantasies. There wasn't much better to do at

such a mind-numbing job. When he walked back inside, shivering and rubbing his arms, he found one of the other cashiers looking at him worriedly. She was new, had just started, so she wasn't used to those types of customers yet.

"Does that happen a lot?" She asked nervously. Poor kid looked like a high schooler, this was probably one of her first jobs if not the very first.

Mike sighed, rounding his register and standing back in his place. He could see another customer making a beeline for him. "Sometimes," he answered her absentmindedly. "Black Friday and Christmas Eve are the worst, you're lucky you just missed those."

As the customer approached, Mike plastered on his customer-service smile. "How can I help you today, ma'am?"

It was early evening before anything mildly interesting happened. Mike was out on the floor in the men's section folding shirts and pants, among other things, when Mandy, the manager, came to find him.

"There's a customer asking for you specifically, can you get out there?" She asked, jerking her thumb towards the front where the registers were. "I'll finish here."

Confused, Mike nervously rubbed his hands on his pants and walked back to the front, his heart racing when he saw who was waiting for him.

Kali's hair was immediately noticeable, starkly purple in the white lights that hung from the ceiling. She had her arms crossed as she waited and she raised an eyebrow when Mike stopped in front of her.

He swallowed. "Um, hi," he said, sticking his hands in his pockets. "What brings you here?"

"When do you finish?" She asked quickly.

"Uh, we close at ten, so ten," he answered. "Why?"

"I have things to discuss with you."

Well, that doesn't sound ominous. "Okay...?"

Kali's eyes flashed in irritation and she mumbled something Mike didn't catch. "I will meet you in front of the deli across from here at ten after."

Abruptly, she turned around and walked back out of the store, leaving Mike with his brain stewing over what she could want to discuss. With Kali, he wasn't sure if it would be good or bad, and he was apprehensive.

On his way back to the clothes, Jake popped out of an aisle and surprised him.

"Who was *that*?" Jake whispered.

Mike ran a shaky hand through his hair, the other pausing on his hip as he stared unseeingly at the shelves in front of him. "My ex's sister."

Jake's eyes blew wide. "Man, if that's her sister, I don't want to know what your ex looks like. That one was scary."

He knew Jake was just trying to be casual and friendly, but Mike couldn't help his irritation. He glared. "She could break your neck if she wanted."

Mike pushed past Jake to get back to work, coming to a halt when Jake remarked, "Damn, glad you broke up, then."

The words "broke up" threw him back to the last months of high school, after *she* had left. All he'd heard in the hallways were things like "She broke up with him and ran away," "I heard they broke up because he got her pregnant! But I don't know... I mean look at him...", and "Hopper broke up with you?! You're never getting another." Or else he'd gotten silent stares. He was at the lowest point in his life during that time and it was clearly visible, yet his classmates loved to talk about it around him and some even dared to ask him about it.

The truth was, they'd never *officially* broken up. She hadn't said or

written anything related to breaking up or the words "break up". She'd just left without a warning, only a messy little letter explaining why and that she didn't know when she'd be back. Because of that, Mike held out hope that she'd return home soon, but as the months passed, his faith lessened. And now it had been seven years, and he still hadn't seen or heard from her besides what Kali had told him last night.

"You don't know what you're talking about, Jake," he answered threateningly. "You really don't want to go there." He ignored Jake's protests and went back to work.

At ten, the Macy's was empty but for its employees on the closing shift, sweeping and mopping the floors and adjusting item racks. Mike had earlier asked Mandy if he could leave right at closing, promising to stay for cleaning every other day next week. He was shrugging his coat on when it occurred to him that he hadn't eaten, so Kali picking the deli across the street was actually perfect.

He exited the building that housed the store and walked around the corner before crossing the street, spotting Kali's short figure illuminated by the light of the deli. She nodded at him when she saw him.

"Hey, so I need to grab something to eat, do you mind?" Asked Mike tentatively.

Kali swept an arm in the direction of the door. "Help yourself. I will wait out here."

Watching to make sure he went inside, Kali spoke. "I told you it was him."

She turned to look at her sister, who was standing behind her masked from the general public by Kali's illusory abilities. Jane was pale, her mouth hanging open and her eyes wet as they stayed focused on the man inside the shop.

"I can't believe he's really here," she said softly. "He looks so *sad*."

Kali waved her off. "He's been working all day, he's tired."

"No, Kali, I know him," Jane answered. "He's *sad*."

Suddenly, said man turned around and sent an awkward thumbs up in their direction. Kali rolled her eyes. "*This* is your boy?"

Her sister sighed. "Now is not the time."

"Are you going to tell him?"

"About her?" Kali nodded and Jane's eyes widened. "No. And you can't tell him either. I love her so much, but it was a mistake. He doesn't have to know."

"You are digging your own grave, sister..."

Jane didn't respond, and the pair waited for Mike to come out of the store.

When he did, Kali nodded at him again and gestured ahead. "Shall we take a walk?"

They walked in silence as Mike devoured his sandwich, but when he finished Kali spoke immediately.

"Remind me again," she said shrewdly, "why you are looking for Eleven?"

Mike sighed, watching his breath puff out in a white cloud. He stuck his hands in his pockets. "I know she had her reasons for leaving, but I never gave up on her coming home. I moved here because I had a good feeling about the city, and now you showed up," he explained. "I just wish I could see her one more time, to tell her that I love her and I miss her, even if it's the last thing I do. Just one last time."

Kali didn't say anything in response, merely contemplating his answer. It was silent for a few minutes longer when, over the crunches of their boots in the snow, Mike thought he heard a sniffle from behind them. He looked over his shoulder and didn't see anything, but he knew Kali's power was illusion.

"Where's your sister?" He asked, trying to act casual.

Kali looked behind them, giving herself away. "Would you like to reveal yourself?"

It must have been her sister who was behind them, then. Mike didn't want to get his hopes up about who she could be, but he also couldn't help but get his hopes up. This resulted in barely repressed anxiousness to have her reveal herself.

"Perhaps somewhere more private, we wouldn't want to cause a scene on the street." Kali seemed to have received a non-verbal response because Mike didn't hear anything.

He cleared his throat. "Uh, we could go back to my apartment? The building has heating, it's at least better than the warehouse," he offered.

Kali squinted at him and checked behind them again before nodding affirmatively. "Alright. Lead the way."

On their short walk, the group had ended up near a subway station, so they quickly boarded one to make their way uptown. They sat in the train car in silence, Kali between Mike and her sister. She knew Mike could not see Jane, but Kali didn't miss the way he kept staring at the seat that appeared empty to him.

"So why is she invisible right now?" He asked suddenly.

Kali looked at Jane, who had her hands pressed to her eyes to stop tears coming out. What Kali could see of her face was pink, and she didn't know whether it was from the cold or from crying. She turned back to Mike.

"She does not want you to see her yet," she replied. "But soon."

None of them said anything after that, just caught a bus for a few stops before getting off in front of a worn-looking building. Mike led the way up the stairs to the fourth floor, opening a door into his small apartment. It was also worn out, cracks in the walls and sad furniture scattered throughout. It kind of made him self-conscious, but like he'd said, at least it was better than the warehouse.

Walking over to the small closet in the room with his computer in it

to take out some blankets, Mike called out towards the main room. "You guys can take the futon, I'll sleep on the floor!"

He heard the soft thump of someone sitting down on the pile of blankets he'd left on the futon and Kali's voice came back to him. "Thank you!"

When he entered the main room again, Kali was still standing in front of the futon and a third person was nowhere in sight. As he appeared, though, Kali gratefully sat down, immediately looking ten times more tired, and Mike knew she'd stopped using her powers. He knew what it looked like when someone completely exhausted themselves that way.

In his peripheral vision, he saw a pair of feet clad in dark boots take a tentative step towards him. Whipping around to see who it was, Mike came face to face with the person he'd been searching for for the last seven years, the person he had been heartbroken over since the day she left, the person who left him to face the darkness on his own.

El.

Her face was tear-stained and bright pink, her hair a mess but much longer than he had ever seen it, her body different from the way he had enshrined it in his memory. Her eyes were the same, pools of honey that communicated the depth of her emotion.

He didn't have time to think about any of it much before his vision tunnelled to black.

When he came to, his head was pillowed by the blankets he'd dropped. He was on the floor by the futon, and when he looked up at it he only saw Kali, asleep. Had he dreamed seeing *her*, then?

Groaning, Mike sat up, and his eyes were immediately drawn to the person he could see rummaging through his fridge. She turned quickly when she heard him, and Mike could do nothing but stare. It was El, in flesh and blood.

"You don't have good food," she said, her voice broken. A sob escaped

her and Mike scrambled up to meet her.

They met in a tight embrace, so much like the first time she'd come back to him but so much worse. Seven years separated them instead of three-hundred fifty-three days, and before that six years of shared history instead of a week. Mike wasn't sure who was more shaken up at the moment; but relief flooded him so intensely he felt it in his bones. It was like he'd finally been allowed to drop the weight he carried after nearly a decade of shouldering it alone. Having El in his arms again felt so *right*, so familiar, it was as if he hadn't just gone years without knowing whether he'd ever see her again.

His hand cradled the back of her head as she cried into his chest, her arms tight around him and his face pressed into her hair. He could tell she probably hadn't showered in at least a week, but he didn't blame her. Being on the run wasn't exactly conducive to taking showers often. Neither of them spoke for a few minutes, Mike's eyes burning as hot tears dripped from his lashes.

"I'm sorry," he heard. El hadn't moved so her voice was muffled by his sweater. "I'm sorry I left, that I didn't tell you."

"Hey, no, you did what you had to," he said, pushing away from her so he could see her face but keeping her close to him. "I'm not- well, I kind of am mad, but I don't-" He sighed. "I don't know."

El sucked in a quivering breath as fresh tears rolled down her face. "You looked so *sad*, at the deli, I-"

The two of them looked at each other for what seemed like an eternity and no time at all before hugging each other tightly once more.

4. Chapter 4

whats up yhall i am so sorry it's been forever and heads up i have no idea when the next chapter is coming bc i have not written a single word for it

but since school is basically over for the year for me now, i'll have more energy to focus on this and hopefully inspiration will come my way yeet

hope you enjoy and let me know what you thought in the comments :)

Friday, January 27th, 1989

Morning dawned brightly on the town of Hawkins that fine January day. Nothing seemed amiss. Chief of police Jim Hopper and his wife Joyce had gotten up to find their children's beds empty, sending Joyce into a panic for about half a minute until she found a note on the kitchen table in Will's handwriting that said: *Left early!*

She breathed a sigh of relief. She remembered Will telling her that he had to go to school early for an art club meeting. El must have gone with him, although why she would've been up earlier than usual was a mystery. Maybe she had a rough night, poor thing.

With no further thought spared to the matter, both Hopper and Joyce left for work half an hour later. Will, of course, was at school for his aforementioned art club meeting. El, on the other hand, was miles away, although nobody would know for several hours yet.

Mike Wheeler woke in his bed in an unusually good mood, not knowing that this day would turn out to be the worst day of his life. El had sneaked over the night before and they'd fooled around for a bit before falling asleep together, and when he woke up she was gone, like usual. She always left in the middle of the night so her family wouldn't catch her. She'd seemed sad last night, but when Mike pressed her she said it wasn't important. So he'd dropped it and by the time they were falling asleep, she was back to normal.

At school, Mike only shared fifth and seventh period with El, as well as lunch. He was suspicious when she didn't show in the cafeteria after fifteen minutes.

"Hey, Will," he said, turning to his friend seated next to him, "where's El?"

Will shrugged. "I left early so I didn't see her this morning, she's probably talking to a teacher or something," he answered, turning back to his sandwich.

Dustin and Lucas were bickering about something stupid, as usual, while Max sat on Lucas' other side uninterestedly eating her lunch.

"Hey," Mike interrupted them. "Have either of you seen El?"

Dustin and Lucas shrugged as well.

"She wasn't in first period," supplied Max.

Mike frowned. Something didn't feel right. Noticing this, Will patted his shoulder.

"Don't worry about it, Mike, I'm sure she's fine," he said. "I know you guys have like, separation anxiety, but she's probably just sick."

Mike nodded uneasily, taking in Will's suggestion but not really believing it. He was more keen to trust his own instincts rather than someone else's, and his gut was telling him something was off.

Worryingly, El wasn't in either of the classes Mike shared with her. The desks next to him that were usually reserved for her remained starkly empty throughout both periods. He tried to talk himself out of worrying so much, because like Will had said, he was probably overreacting. It was January after all, it was cold. El had probably just woken up this morning not feeling well and decided to stay home.

At the end of the day, his friends all stood at the edge of the parking lot shivering. Mike was the last one out, having swung by the rest of El's teachers only to hear that she hadn't been to any of her other classes. He picked up her homework for her, giving it to Will when

he got outside.

"She's been absent all day, guys," he said breathlessly. He could feel the anxiety creeping up on him. It was always there as he was naturally an anxious and fidgety person, but something about the way El had behaved last night coupled with her absence today left Mike with a darkness curdling in the pit of his stomach.

After dropping Dustin off, Mike went home. Lucas had dropped off Will at work since he was leaving Max as well and they sort of went in the same direction. Mike figured Will would call him later if anything was gravely wrong. *Which it **isn't***, he desperately reminded himself.

Will didn't call. He'd gone to work, he wouldn't know anything was wrong. His shift at The Hawk ended at eleven and Hopper picked him up on the way home from the station, and then they got home to a house with a tired Joyce napping on the couch.

Will looked around confusedly at the very noticeable lack of his stepsister as his mom roused herself.

"Is El okay?" He asked, shucking off his snowy boots by the door.

Hopper frowned at him. "What do you mean? She's not with Wheeler?"

Will shrugged, hanging up his coat. "She wasn't at school, I thought she was sick or something."

Hopper traded a look with Joyce.

"Honey, both of your beds were empty this morning," said Joyce. "We saw your note and we thought she left with you," she added, her voice rising and panicky at the end.

"You're sure she's not with Mike?" Hopper asked gruffly. Mostly everything Hopper said was gruff, but over the years Will had come to know how to distinguish the varying levels of gruffness in the man's voice. Right now, Hopper was worried out of his mind.

Will shook his head. "Mike didn't know where she was either, he was

freaking out all day."

Hopper took a deep breath and closed his eyes. Joyce fearfully looked between her son and her husband, holding tightly to Will's shoulder. After a second, Hopper walked down the hall and straight into El's room, looking for anything that might be out of place. Immediately, he noticed a piece of ruled paper sitting on El's desk. It was unusual as she liked to keep her desk neat at all times. Hopper hadn't taken note of it in the morning, having dismissed it as homework or something of the sort, but now he walked over and a flash of fear whipped through him when he saw that it was addressed *Family*.

Joyce and Will stood in the doorway behind him, watching nervously as his eyes scanned the paper before he dropped it and sat down heavily on his daughter's bed.

"What is it, Hop?" Asked Joyce.

Hopper didn't answer, so Joyce gingerly walked over to the paper and picked it up to read herself, one hand slapping over her mouth and the other shaking violently as she read.

Will waited as his mother shakily passed him the paper and sat down next to Hopper. He looked down and as he read he suddenly understood why his mom and Hopper looked the way they did.

Dear Dad, Joyce, Will, Jonathan, Dustin, Lucas, and Max,

I'm sorry. I saw him. Brenner is coming back and he is going to find me and hurt me. I have to leave. I love you all. Please don't try to find me. I don't know how long I will be gone. I left a letter with Mike to. Please tell him it's not his fault, don't let him blame himself. None of you can blame yourselves.

I will miss you and I will come home one day.

Love, El

Will could feel his eyes burning. She just up and *left*? He couldn't believe it. Mike had been right.

Oh god.

Mike.

He wasn't going to take this well. Will absently wondered if Mike had found his letter yet as he lowered himself to the floor, shell-shocked. The three sat in silence for Will didn't know how long, until Hopper broke it by standing and slamming his fists on El's desk. Pencils rattled inside.

"That *bastard*," he growled. "I swear I'm going to kill him." He stalked out of the room and Will followed him with his eyes, listening as Hopper shoved on the boots he had removed minutes earlier. He slammed the door and the Blazer's engine could be heard starting outside.

Of course, Hopper was on his way over to the Wheelers'. He needed to know when the last time his daughter's boyfriend had seen her was. When he arrived, he could see the kitchen light still on. It being nearly midnight, it was either Karen or Mike that was still up.

Hopper knocked on the door and watched through the glass as a tall and skinny shadow made its way over.

Mike's look of confusion quickly changed into one of worry when he saw Hopper, but he clearly hadn't found the letter El had said she'd left him. He would've been out of his mind if he had. Hopper's toughened heart broke a little for the kid when he realized he'd be the one to deliver the news.

Mike shivered in the gust of cold air from outside, his thin pyjama shirt not doing much to keep him warm.

"What's going on, Hopper?"

Hopper's jaw tightened. "When's the last time you saw El, kid?"

Mike shrugged. "Uh, yesterday...?"

"At school?"

Mike's eyes dropped and his hand came up to the back of his neck. It hadn't been at school, but he didn't want to throw El under the bus and tell her dad she'd sneaked over.

"Yeah," he mumbled, awkwardly avoiding looking at Hopper. What the hell was this whole inquisition about?

"Kid, look at me," Hopper said, his tone telling Mike he had no choice. "I know she comes over here without telling me sometimes, and I know you're lying. You can't fool me that easily. When was the last time you saw her?"

The boy swallowed. "Last night," he said quietly. "She came over and we were together for a while but she was gone when I woke up, like always."

Hopper ran a hand down his face, looking at Mike out of one eye. "Did she seem strange? Any bags with her?" He didn't know how he was managing to go about this so calmly.

Mike wrapped his arms around his thin frame, stepping a little back out of the doorway. "She looked upset but she said it was nothing so I didn't ask again. No bags."

Both were silent before Mike sucked in a shaky breath and asked, "What's this about? Is everything okay?"

Hopper let himself into the house and Mike shut the door.

"Everything is far from okay, kid," he said gravely, and Mike felt like his stomach had fallen out his ass. "Where's your room?"

Mike led Hopper to his room as quietly as possible, flicking on the lamp by his bed. He didn't know what reason Hopper could have for looking in his room, but he guessed Hopper wouldn't be here without a reason. He just wished Hopper would tell him already. He had felt that something was wrong all day and now this was happening and he needed an explanation.

Hopper's eyes roved around the room for a few moments before fixing on the bookshelf and the piece of paper lying on it that looked strangely out of place.

"Did you see that this morning?" He asked.

Mike shook his head, walking over to pick it up. On it was written his

name in El's recognizable handwriting. Hopper was dead silent as he watched the boy in front of him unfold the letter.

Dear Mike, it read,

I love you. I am sorry I had to leave. I saw Brenner and he is coming back. He wants to hurt me. I know you will want to but do not look for me. I don't know when I will be back but I promise I will come home one day. Please don't blame yourself. It is not your fault I didn't tell you. I will miss you and I promise I will be ok.

I promise I love you.

Love, El

Mike didn't even breathe for a few moments; it was like absolutely everything had come to a halt. His breath caught in his chest, his heart skipped a few beats, his thoughts stopped processing once he realized what this meant. She was gone. *Gone*. To where, probably not even she knew. His whole world just ripped out from under him in the blink of an eye.

He shook as he turned to where Hopper was standing by the door, taking in the man's deflated posture.

"We have to look for her."

Hopper shook his head resignedly, looking up. Mike saw tears glinting in his eyes. "There's no finding her, kid. Not if she doesn't want to be found. She asked us not to look for her."

A sudden wave of shock and rage came over Mike. He hated it, but he knew he was powerless to do anything impactful to the situation. He could simply do nothing but scream.

Saturday, January 13, 1996

"And then I just screamed," said Mike tiredly. "I woke up my whole family, and I'm pretty sure I punched Hopper at some point before I started crying. I didn't go to school for like, a week. It was like I was going insane. And after that, I just... everything sucked."

"I'm sorry," El whispered. "I'm so sorry."

Mike sighed, hugging her tighter. "I understand that you did what you thought you had to."

"I missed you so much," El said into Mike's shoulder. "There were so many times when I just needed you with me and I couldn't have you. So many times."

"Me too," he answered, and tears pricked his eyes once more.

They were both silent for a few minutes, clinging to each other as if their lives depended on it, before El stepped back from Mike to look at her sister. Kali was still asleep. El sniffed loudly, wiping her face, then sat down heavily on the floor of Mike's kitchen. She couldn't believe she was really seeing him in front of her, flesh and blood, tactile. He wasn't imaginary, or the ghost of a memory. He was *real*.

"So," she said, her tone gravelly. "I guess you went to college?"

Mike nodded and joined her on the floor. "Majored in comp sci, like I wanted to. I mean, I don't know if you remember-

"You weren't sure whether to go into computer science or writing, I remember," El interrupts. "I didn't forget about everything as soon as I left."

He looked at her for a long moment, and the scary thing about it was that the look in his eyes was unreadable. El had never not been able to read Mike Wheeler like an open book. It was unsettling.

"I ended up picking comp sci," he continued. "I learned how to hack on the side. Sometimes I hack into the Department of Energy just to see if I can find anything interesting. Sometimes there's stuff, but I don't do it often because it's hard. The Boston police is easy, but there's never anything interesting there."

"So why do you work at Macy's then?" El asked curiously. "You could have a better job."

Mike looked at his socked feet as he drew his knees closer to him, wrapping his arms around them. "I wouldn't have time to do what I

wanted to do. I've been looking for you this whole time. There were times when I stopped, but I never gave up hope that someday... I could see you again."

El didn't respond. She wasn't sure how to. She'd stopped checking on him in the void after... well, things. She thought he would've forgotten about her by now.

"And I know it sounds stupid, but the whole reason I moved here was because I felt something good about this city," Mike added in a watery voice. "My parents cut me off when I said I wasn't moving back to Hawkins."

El balked at this. She had known Mike didn't have the best or most open relationship with his parents, but she never would've expected something like this. "They cut you off?"

Mike nodded sadly. "The only one who still talks to me is Nancy. I guess Holly probably would too, but she still lives in Hawkins, so... I haven't seen her in almost three years. I dunno if my mom regrets telling me what she did, but... she did."

He snorted and El watched as he raised a hand to wipe at his face. "She told me it'd been long enough and I needed to move the fuck on, basically. That you were never going to come back and my entire thing I had going on was hopeless. Honestly, at that point in my life, she might as well have told me to go kill myself and it would've been the same."

El didn't answer. She felt guilty for having been the cause of his suffering, even though she herself had shared the same pain. She didn't know what to say.

"I was doing really badly at the time 'cause I wasn't medicated yet, but I take antidepressants now so I'm a bit better," said Mike. "But I'm not important right now. What I want to know is what happened with you."

This she could talk about. Except for one major thing that she wasn't going to mention, because although Mike was part of the reason for that thing, he didn't need to know. Not right now, at least. But her

heart lurched at the reminder that Maisie had been gone for two days now and El hadn't been able to locate her.

"Well," she started, "I tracked Kali to San Francisco, so I caught a bus out of Hawkins and then a train in Indianapolis. When I found her, I told her about Brenner going back to Hawkins to look for me. After that, we decided we were going to end him once and for all. But to do that, we had to get rid of all the others."

Mike's gaze was steadfast, not moving from her face as El told the story. She shivered. "We had a lot of... issues, during the first year, so we couldn't do much then. And because of those issues we've had to go slower than we wanted to. That's why it's been so long. The last guy was here, in Boston, and that's why we came here. Now we have to find Brenner," she finished, "but he has someone with him because I can't track him."

And that was how she knew Maisie was with Brenner for certain, because what other reason could there be for El not being able to track her? Her stomach churned at the thought of Maisie under Brenner's control. They *had* to get her back, or El would die trying.

"So what's the plan, then?" Asked Mike, balancing his head on his arms. "How are you going to end him if you can't find him?"

El blinked rapidly to get rid of frustrated tears she could feel coming. "I don't know," she whispered. "I just have to keep trying. The other person has to get tired eventually. And..."

She wasn't sure whether to tell Mike the last bit, but he decided for her.

"And?"

She cleared her throat. "He took someone we had with us. He's not stupid, he knows we want her back, so at some point he's going to use her to lure us. But he has to let me see where they are."

Mike nodded, sighing. "I'm sorry she got taken."

El closed her eyes tightly in fear that he would see the truth flash through them. If only he knew...

She kept her eyes closed as she heard Mike shuffle himself into a standing position.

"We should go to sleep," he said, his voice coming from much closer than before. He grasped her arms and tugged her up, then over to where Kali was sleeping. "We've got plans to make tomorrow."